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OUR NATIONAL FLAG

WHICH TO-DAY IS SO GENERALLY FLOAT-
ING OVER OUR HOMES, SCHOOL-HOUSES
AND PLACES OF BUSINESS, IS OF GREATER
INTEREST THAN EVER BEFORE.

LET US KNOW ITS HISTORY.

THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN SEND YOU
MORE INTERESTING.

PLEASE ACCEPT WITH OUR COMPLIMENTS

RUMSEY, LIGHTNER & Co.,

CHICAGO, ILL.

GRAIN, SEEDS AND PROVISION.

COMMISSION MERCHANTS



THE FLAG
OF THE
UNITED STATES

REPORT BY

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBT. H. HALL, U. S. A.

TO ILLINOIS COMMANDERY OF THE MILITARY
ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF
THE UNITED STATES.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

1898.

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The Flag of the United States.

Although we are a comparatively young nation, the Stars and Stripes may claim antiquity among national flags. They are older than the flag of Great Britain, which was established in 1801; than the French tri-color, which was decreed in 1794; than the flag of the German Empire, which dates from 1870; than the flag of Spain, which was decreed in 1785; than the flag of Italy, which was established in 1848; than that of Sweden and Norway, which was decreed in 1817; than the flag of Portugal, which was adopted in 1815; than the recent flags of the empires of China and Japan; or those of all the South American States, which have in general been modeled from our own.

The flags used by the American colonies before they declared their independence of Great Britain would naturally be the flag of England, but this was not the invariable rule. Several flags, differing more or less from the ensigns of that kingdom, were at times in use, but they are not now objects of our inquiries.

It is not positively ascertained that any flags were carried by the minute men and militia who fought at Lexington and Concord, or by the colonial troops in the

battle of Bunker Hill. It is certain that none were captured from them by the British. In Trumbull's painting of this battle, it is true, a flag is represented as hoisted at the redoubt, but this cannot be considered authoritative in view of contemporary accounts and the recollections of old soldiers. But for some months after the beginning of the siege of Boston, what is known as the pine-tree flag was in common, but by no means universal use in the besieging army, and on the floating batteries in Charles river, and the vessels of the infant navy. This flag was of white bunting, having in the center, on one side, a green pine-tree, and on the other side the motto, "Appeal to Heaven." It was under this flag that in January, 1776, Commodore Tucker, while commanding a small schooner, captured a British transport having on board stores and troops destined for General Gage's force in Boston. But, although there are recorded in the history of those days many instances of the use of the pine-tree flag between October, 1775, and July, 1776, it was never in a proper sense a national flag.

The necessity for a common flag seems not to have been thought of until Dr. Benjamin Franklin, of Pennsylvania, Thomas Lynch, of South Carolina, and Benjamin Harrison, of Virginia, visited Washington's camp, at Cambridge, in October, 1775, as a committee from Congress to consult with him and with others "touching the most effectual method of continuing, supporting, and regulating a continental army." They considered, also, the subject of a flag, and the result of their conference was the retention of the English colors, the crosses of St.

George and St. Andrew, red on a blue ground, in the upper quarter, next the staff, to represent the still recognized sovereignty of England, coupled with thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, emblematic of the union of the thirteen colonies against England's tyranny and oppression. The new striped flag was first hoisted on the second of January, 1776, over the camp at Cambridge, receiving a salute of thirteen guns and thirteen cheers; but it was only a suggestion, for its use was seemingly not required. A squadron of five vessels commanded by Commodore Hopkins, sailed under this flag from Philadelphia, and on March 2, 1776, made a descent on the island of New Providence, capturing the town of Nassau, with the governor, and one hundred cannon and a large quantity of other military stores. This flag, too, was triumphantly carried into Boston on the afternoon of March 17, 1776, by a detachment under the command of Colonel Ebenezer Learned, of the Third Regiment of Continental Infantry. And it remained the quasi continental colors during the disastrous battle of Long Island, the evacuation of New York, the momentary success at Harlem Heights, the British repulse at White Plains, the crushing loss of Forts Washington and Lee, the dreary retreat through the Jerseys, and the brilliant strokes at Trenton and Princeton.

In the meantime, Congress had declared the independence of the colonies, and their right to be free and independent states. But although the declaration was published to the world on the fourth of July, 1776, it was not until Saturday, June 14th, 1777, that Congress "*Resolved*

—That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." This date, then, is the birthday of our Stars and Stripes, and on it is based their rightful claim to antiquity among national flags.

There has been much ingenious but not very profitable speculation as to the origin of the flag. The Resolve was printed in the newspapers in August, but was not officially promulgated under the signature of the Secretary of Congress, at Philadelphia, until the third of September. No record has been found of the discussions which must have preceded its adoption, nor do we know to whom we are indebted for the beautiful and inspiring combination of stars and stripes. It does not appear from the records whether it was the suggestion of an individual, or of a committee, or who presented the resolve. It seems probable that it emanated from the Marine Committee, and this, indeed, is the tradition. Of the many theories as to the flag's origin, none are found to be wholly satisfactory in this, the one hundred and twentieth year after its adoption.

It is claimed that a Mrs. John Ross, an upholsterer, who lived on Arch Street, Philadelphia, was the maker of the first flag, combining the stars and stripes. Her descendants assert that a committee of Congress, accompanied by General Washington, who was in Philadelphia in June, 1776, called upon Mrs. Ross and engaged her to make the flag from a rough drawing, which at her suggestion, was re-drawn by General Washington with pencil,

in her back parlor, and that the flag thus designed was adopted by Congress a year later.

The first military incident connected with the new flag occurred on the second of August, 1777, when the British Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger began the siege of Fort Schuyler, where the town of Rome, Oneida County, New York, now stands. The garrison being without a flag hastily devised one. Bits of scarlet cloth were put together to make the red, shirts were cut up to form the white, and the blue ground for the stars was composed of a cloak contributed by one of the captains of the garrison. Under this novel, extemporized flag, seven hundred and fifty brave men commanded by Colonel Peter Gansevoort, of New York, sustained a siege of twenty-one days by an undetermined number of Indians, British regular soldiers, Canadians and tories. But it seems well authenticated that the Stars and Stripes as we now see them, except as to the number of the stars, were first unfurled at the battle of Brandywine, September 11, 1777, eight days after they were officially promulgated at Philadelphia. This was the flag that saw the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga and of Cornwallis at Yorktown, and which with Washington entered New York City at one o'clock on the afternoon of November 25, 1783, close upon the heels of the departing British.

By the year 1794, Vermont and Kentucky had been admitted into the Union, and in January a bill was introduced in the Senate to increase the number of stars and of stripes to fifteen. It promptly passed the Senate, but in the House of Representatives met with much opposition

and contemptuous ridicule. The bill was finally passed and approved January 13, 1794, to take effect May 1, 1795. This flag with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, remained the national flag for twenty-three years, until 1818. To it, in the war of 1812, the British frigates Guerriere, Macedonian and Java struck their colors; with it, Perry, only ten years older than the flag itself, rode, triumphant, on Lake Erie; and Pakenham with his seasoned soldiers went down before it at New Orleans.

In 1799, the revenue flag was created by Congress, and in pursuance of the Act, the Secretary of the Treasury ordered on August 1, of that year, that "the ensign and pennant directed by the President under the Act of March 2, 1799, consist of sixteen perpendicular stripes, alternate red and white, the union of the ensign bearing the arms of the United States, in dark blue on a white field." The sixteen stripes represented the number of States then in the Union, and the ensign has since undergone no change. This is the flag habitually displayed over the custom-houses and other buildings, and on the revenue cutters pertaining to the Treasury Department. In 1871, the revenue pennant was altered by substituting thirteen blue stars for the eagle in the union.

Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana and Indiana were successively admitted as States, and a change in the national flag seemed desirable. Accordingly after the admission of the nineteenth state, Indiana, December 11, 1816, the Honorable Peter H. Wendover, of New York, offered in the House a resolution, "that a committee be appointed to inquire into the expediency of altering the flag of the

United States." Such a committee was thereupon appointed; and while it had the matter under consideration, Mr. Wendover called for advice upon Captain Samuel Chester Reid, a sailing master in the navy, who had made his name a memorable one in United States history by his defense of the privateer brig *General Armstrong*, carrying seven guns and ninety men, against the attack of a British squadron of three sail, carrying one hundred and thirty-six guns and more than two thousand men, in one of the most remarkable naval battles on record, in the harbor of Fayal, in the Azores, September 26 and 27, 1814. Captain Reid recommended that the number of stripes be reduced to thirteen, to represent the original states, that the number of stars be increased to the number of all the states, and that an additional star be added for each new state admitted. A bill was introduced conformable to this suggestion, but through pressure of other business before Congress was not acted upon. On the 16th of December, 1817, after the reassembling of Congress, Mr. Wendover again introduced his resolution, and a bill substantially the same as its predecessor was passed by the House of Representatives, March 24, 1818, with but two or three dissenting votes, and by the Senate, unanimously. It was approved by the président, James Monroe, Saturday, April 4, 1818. Its title had been changed in the House, and the exact text of the law is as follows: "*An act to establish the Flag of the United States.* SECTION I. *Be it enacted*, etc. That, from and after the fourth day of July next, the flag of the United States be thirteen horizontal stripes, alternate

red and white; that the union be twenty stars, white, in a blue field. SECTION 2. *And be it further enacted,* That, on the admission of every new state into the Union, one star be added to the union of the flag; and that such addition shall take effect on the fourth day of July then next succeeding such admission. *Approved,* April 4th, 1818."

The twentieth state, Mississippi, had been admitted since the bill was originally introduced, but the first state to be admitted after its approval, the one which gave the twenty-first star to the flag, was the state of Illinois.

Although the law designated the fourth of the next July as the date of the official adoption of the flag, Captain Reid had generously completed one, and it was hoisted on Congress Hall at 2 o'clock p. m., Monday, April 13, 1818. But it was not until February 24, 1866, that a strictly American flag, made from American bunting, was hoisted over the capital at Washington, our flags before that date having been of bunting made in England. The national flags now hoisted at forts or camps and on the shipping of the navy are made of bunting of American manufacture.

There are seven red and six white stripes on the flag, the red being at top and bottom. The union is placed in the upper quarter, next to the staff, and extends to the lower edge of the fourth red stripe from the top, and is one-third the length of the flag. There was formerly great lack of uniformity in the arrangement of the stars in the union, but in the flag now used they are grouped in six horizontal rows, the first, third and fifth rows having

eight stars each, and the second, fourth and sixth having each seven stars, making the required total of forty-five.

It is sometimes mentioned as singular that the stars on our flag are five-pointed, while our coins have on them stars with six points. But in the heraldic language of England, stars are six-pointed, while in that of France, Germany and Holland they have five points, only, and the designer of our early coins followed the English, while the designer of our flag followed the continental custom.

Every military post occupied by troops is provided with three flags, one of which is flying every day; *first*, the garrison flag, which is twenty feet wide and thirty-six feet long, and is hoisted only on holidays and important occasions; *second*, the post flag, which measures ten by twenty feet and habitually flies in pleasant weather; and, *third*, the storm flag, which is four feet two inches wide and eight feet long, and is hoisted when the weather is windy or stormy. This last flag is also used to designate recruiting stations.

The flag at military posts is hoisted by a non-commissioned officer and two privates of the guard immediately after the gun is fired in the morning, usually at five o'clock in the summer, and six o'clock in the winter months. It is lowered by a like party when the gun is fired at sunset, and this is done with some form. The garrison is paraded, and stands at attention while the band plays the "Star Spangled Banner;" and the lowering of the flag is so regulated that as the band finishes the air, the flag reaches the bottom of the staff. The

garrison then disperses and the flag is neatly folded and carried to the guard-house where it is carefully kept until again needed.

Each regiment in the army has two flags which are known as the colors ; one the national color, the Stars and Stripes, and the other the regimental color. Both are of silk. Another national color, of bunting, known as the service color, is also furnished each regiment to be used at drills and on ordinary marches. Each of these colors, except for the cavalry, is four feet four inches wide, and five feet six inches long, and is fastened to a pike which is nine feet in length. The cavalry colors, which are called standards, are somewhat smaller and the pike a little longer. The colors and standards are carried by non-commissioned officers who have been distinguished for meritorious conduct and for soldierly bearing. The national color has embroidered on its center stripe, in silver for the engineers, in white silk for the infantry, and in yellow silk for the artillery and cavalry, the number and name of the regiment to which it belongs. The regimental color is scarlet for the engineers and artillery, blue for the infantry and yellow for the cavalry ; and has embroidered on it for the engineers, in silver, a castle, with the letters " U. S. " above it, and the word " Engineers " below it ; for the infantry and cavalry, the coat of arms of the United States, and below the eagle a red scroll on which is embroidered the number and name of the regiment in white for the infantry and yellow for the cavalry ; for the artillery, two cannon, crossed, with the letters " U. S. " above

them and below them the number and name of the regiment, in scarlet letters on a yellow scroll. The silken national colors are carried in battle and on occasions of ceremony. The regimental colors are also carried in battle but not at ceremonies unless the whole regiment is present. The names of battles in which a regiment has been distinguished for good conduct are engraved on silver rings which are fastened to the pike.

Officers and enlisted men passing the national color render the prescribed salute. With no arms in hand the salute is made by uncovering.

Each troop of cavalry and light battery of artillery is provided with a guidon, which is a swallow-tailed flag, three feet five inches long and two feet three inches wide. Those for the cavalry are of two horizontal stripes each one-half the width of the flag, the upper stripe red, with the number of the regiment on it in white, and the lower white, with the letter of the troop in red. Those for the light batteries are of scarlet, bearing in the center two cross cannon, with the number of the regiment above, and the letter of the battery below them, all in yellow.

The distinctive mark of a ship of the navy in commission is a flag, or pennant, at the mast-head of the main. The national ensign on a ship of the navy at anchor is hoisted at 8 a. m. and kept flying until sunset, if the weather permits, and is also hoisted whenever a ship comes to anchor or gets under way. When it is to be hoisted the field musicians and the band are required to be present. The music gives three rolls and three flourishes. At the third roll the ensign is started from

the deck, hoisted slowly to the peak, or truck, and, while it is ascending, the band plays "The Star Spangled Banner." When the ensign leaves the deck all sentinels salute and remain in that position until the band ceases to play. All officers and men during the same time stand facing the ensign and salute it when it reaches the truck, or peak. The same form is followed at sunset, when the ensign is lowered, except that the rolls and flourishes are given before the ensign is started down, the band plays "Hail Columbia" while it is descending, and the officers and the men salute it as it touches the deck. Like ceremonies are observed, as closely as possible, at all our naval stations. Every officer and man on reaching the quarter-deck of a ship, or on leaving it to go over the side, salutes the national ensign.

On the Fourth of July and the 22nd of February every ship of the navy in commission, and not under way, dresses ship at 8 a. m. and, weather permitting, remains dressed until sunset.

At no military post and on no ship of the navy is the flag permitted to be dipped, except in return for such a compliment.

As a sign of distress, the world over, the national flag is displayed with the union down, and a sign of mourning equally universal is a flag flying at half-mast.

Our flag was first saluted by a foreign power, February 14, 1778, at Quiberon Bay, France, when the French Admiral LaMotte Piquet saluted the flag of the *Ranger*, commanded by Captain Paul Jones.

It first appeared on the Great Lakes in 1797 on a short-lived schooner which was in that year launched at Erie, Pennsylvania.

It first appeared at Chicago in 1804 when the troops arrived to construct Fort Dearborn.

It was carried to Lat. 83 deg., 24 min., North, on May 13, 1882, by Lieutenant James B. Lockwood, of the 23rd U. S. Infantry, its furthest north.

It was carried to Lat. 70 deg., 14 min., South, on March 24, 1839, by Lieutenant William M. Walker, of the Navy, its furthest south.

It was first carried around the world on the ship *Columbia*, which sailed from Boston, September 30, 1787, and returned to that port by the way of the Cape of Good Hope, August 10, 1790. And it is interesting to note, it was this same good ship, *Columbia* which on the 11th of May, 1792, under the same commander, Robert Gray, entered the mouth of, and gave its name to, the great river in the northwest.

The addition of the twenty-eighth star, for Texas, was speedily followed by the war with Mexico, and before that war had made much progress the twenty-ninth star had been added to represent Iowa. It was the flag of twenty-eight stars which was so gallantly upheld against odds of four to one on the glorious field of Buena Vista by Hardin's and Bissell's Illinois regiments; and it was the flag of twenty-nine stars which was borne by General Scott on his triumphal march from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico.

The outbreak of the Rebellion found thirty-four stars in the union of the flag. This was the constellation which shone on Grant at Fort Donelson, while at Appomatox two additional stars, thirty-six in all, smiled approval, we may believe, on the prowess of the same favored son of Illinois.

When in 1794, it was proposed to add two additional stars to the flag, for Vermont and Kentucky, it was objected that within fifteen years we might be obliged, by such a rule, to have a flag with twenty stars. Although it was not until twenty-three years later that so many states were in the Union, no one probably would have then ventured to predict that forty-five stars would be in the constellation one hundred years after the Secretary of the Treasury proclaimed the revenue flag with its sixteen vertical stripes.



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